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White House Hosts Pitch by Nicaraguan Rebel Leader

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Nicaraguan rebel leader Eden Pastora Gomez met with National Security Council officials at the White House Wednesday after speaking to about 150 leaders of conservative and religious groups, businessmen and Hispanics at a session arranged by administration officials, it was learned yesterday.

Pastora, a former Sandinista leader who split with the Nicaraguan rulers more than two years ago because he objected to their ties with Cuba, is visiting the United States to seek political and financial support for his guerrilla group in its fight to overthrow the Sandinista government.

Because of his former Sandinista connections, his opposition to direct U.S. intervention in Central America and his refusal to join with a separate group of CIA-backed anti-Sandinista rebels, the Reagan administration has been reluctant to back him and suspicious of his efforts.

But the administration periodically has considered courting Pastora in the belief that his stature as a revolutionary hero during the Sandinista war that overthrew dictator Anastasio Somoza might make him a more palatable Nicaraguan leader than those in the U.S.-backed group, which is led by many former Somoza soldiers.

During his presentation Wednesday in the Old Executive Office Building, Pastora was peppered with questions about connections his

group might have with Cuba. Several months ago, a Pastora envoy met with officials in Havana in what Pastora has said was an effort to take advantage of Cuban willingness to promote a peaceful settlement of the Nicaraguan conflict.

At one point Wednesday, responding to suggestions that he is receiving financial aid from Cuban President Fidel Castro, Pastora reportedly said: "That's as likely as Fidel Castro committing suicide."

In all of his public statements here, Pastora has issued equally strong denunciations of U.S. and Cuban "intervention" in Nicaragua and has maintained that he seeks assistance for a "Nicaraguan" solution to conflicts within the country.

Pastora, asked if he is getting covert U.S. aid, replied, "We get aid from many places."

In other conversations, he has acknowledged that his guerrilla group, which he estimates at 3,000 to 4,000 members, may be receiving "indirect" CIA assistance through a third party, but has said he has no direct knowledge of such an arrangement.

Political leaders in his organization, the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, however, have said that relatively small amounts of CIA funding are funneled to them through Latin American business and political groups.

Morton C. Blackwell, special assistant to the president for public liaison, arranged Pastora's appearance as part of a continuing White

House effort to win support for its Latin American policies.

Pastora left Washington for San Francisco yesterday after meeting with Ambassador Otto J. Reich, coordinator of the State Department's Office of Latin American Public Diplomacy, and Langhorne A. (Tony) Motley, assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs.

One State Department official said Pastora's visit "is by no means recognition of him" but added that the administration wants a "working agreement with a charismatic leader like him."

Another official said there is "growing acceptance" in the strongly anti-communist administration of the long-suspect Pastora.